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AUTHOR Schneider, Frank W.
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ABSTRACT

This paper reports a study of conformity reactions of white and black children to the unanimous and incorrect judgment of children from either their own or other ethnic groups. Experimental groups comprised four subjects of the same sex and grade level. Groups representing all Negro were used; all variables were completely crossed. The subjects were 48 male and 48 female seventh and eighth graders from an urban junior high school in Florida. Each sex group was half white and half black in number. The procedure gave the subject fifteen opportunities to conform to the unanimous and incorrect judgment by what appeared to be the other three members of his group. The test related to the area of three different geometric figures drawn on each of 25 different cards. The group appeared to label the smallest figure as having the largest area. Preliminary analyses provided some evidence that in this population conformity is negatively related to intelligence. Additionally, the ethnic group by source of pressure interaction was the only significant source of variance. Whites conformed more to white peers than to black peers, and the whites conformed more to whites than did Negroes to Negroes. [Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document.] (JM)

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DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NEGRO AND WHITE SCHOOL CHILDREN[1] IN CONFORMING BEHAVIOR

Frank W. Schneider

University of Windsor

Studies dealing with the reaction of whites to interaction with Negroes largely have been restricted to an assessment of the association between ethnic attitudes and overt behavior. Several investigators, using a variety of procedures, have subjected white college students to the social influence of Negroes (Berg, 1966; Bray, 1950; Katz & Benjamin, 1960; Malof & Lott, 1962). A review of such studies indicates that predictions of the interracial behavior of white college students based on their responses to attitude scales are consistently unreliable, and that white college students seem to be as susceptible to influence pressures from Negroes as from whites.

Studies of biracial interaction involving Negro subjects have concentrated on the consequences of such interaction upon the performance of Negro college students on a variety of verbal and nonverbal tasks (Katz & Benjamin, 1960; Katz & Cohen, 1962; Katz, Goldston, & Benjamin, 1958; Preston & Bayton, 1941). These studies have demonstrated, both under cooperative and competitive conditions, that Negro students tend to interact with white students in a socially inhibited and subservient manner.

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One experiment has dealt with Negro-white differences in conformity. Iscoe, Williams, and Harvey (1964) used a click-counting task to study the conforming of Negro and white children from segregated schools to the influence of peers of their own ethnic group. The results indicated that the Negro children conformed less than the white children; however, the difference was due entirely to the large divergence between the white and Negro females. The Negro females conformed at the same level as the males of both ethnic groups.

In addition to testing the generality of results of Iscoe, Williams, and Harvey (1964), the present study extended the investigation of Negro-white differences in conformity to an analysis of the effect of differences in the ethnic composition of the source of influence. The following three hypotheses were direct generalizations from the experimental evidence just reviewed:

1. There will be no difference in the amount of conformity displayed by white children to a unanimous majority of white peers and to a unanimous majority of Negro peers.

2. The Negro children will conform more to a unanimous majority of white peers than to a unanimous majority of Negro peers.

3. Negro males, Negro females, and white males will display similar amounts of conformity to a unanimous majority of peers of their own ethnic groups and less conformity than white females.

Method

The major dependent variable was conformity behavior. The independent variables included ethnic group, sex, and source of unanimous majority pressure (own or other ethnic group).

Subjects

The subjects were seventh and eighth graders from an urban junior high school located in Florida. The school was comprised of approximately 300 Negroes and 1500 whites. The data from 24 males and 24 females of each ethnic group were used, making a total of 96 subjects. There were 12 subjects per condition.

Experimental groups were comprised of four subjects of the same sex and grade level. Groups representing four variations in ethnic composition were used. They included all Negro groups, all white groups, groups of three Negroes and a white, and groups of three whites and a Negro.

Instruments

The apparatus used to measure conformity was similar to the one used by Crutchfield (1955). It consisted of five cubicles. The center cubicle was occupied by the experimenter and contained a master panel of lights and switches and a Baesler opaque projector for projecting stimuli on a screen positioned 10 feet away. A subject sat in each of the side cubicles. The subjects' cubicles contained a panel of four rows of three lights each, with three mercury switches placed below the fourth row of lights. When a switch was turned on, it activated the light immediately above it in the fourth row and a corresponding light on the experimenter's master panel. Although the subjects were instructed that the lights in the first three rows were controlled by the other subjects, they actually were controlled by the experimenter.

The stimulus materials consisted of 25 cards each of which had drawn on it three different geometric figures which varied in size. During the experiment, a subject was given 15 opportunities to conform. Thus, a subject's over-all conformity score could range from 0 (no conformity)

to 15 (total conformity).

Procedure

The experiment was carried out at the subjects' school in the spring of 1968. The subjects were told that their task was to judge which of the geometric figures was largest in area and to indicate their choice by pushing an appropriate switch on their panels. The experimenter privately assigned each subject his position in the order of responding. All subjects were assigned position number four. On the critical conformity pressure trials the experimenter activated the first three rows of lights in the subjects' booths so that it appeared to each subject that the other three subjects had chosen the smallest geometric figure rather than the largest, i.e. the subject was opposed by a unanimous majority of peers. Thus, in some instances (the own pressure conditions) the subject was confronted with a unanimous majority of peers of his own ethnic group, while in other cases (other pressure condition) the subject was faced with a unanimous majority of peers of the other ethnic group.

The test period consisted of 20 trials with the geometric stimuli. On 15 of the 20 trials the experimenter simulated a peer majority of erroneous judgments, wherein it appeared as though the majority chose the smallest geometric figure instead of the largest. Each subject's conformity score was the number of times his choice corresponded with the erroneous judgment of the simulated majority.

Results

Preliminary analyses provided some evidence that in the population under consideration conformity is negatively related to intelligence. Thus, conformity data were analyzed by means of a 2 x 2 x 2 analysis of

covariance with IQ as the covariate. The three factors were ethnic group, sex, and source of pressure. Also the conformity scores were subjected to square root transformations in order to make the cell variances more homogeneous.

The ethnic group x source of pressure interaction was the only significant source of variance (F = 5.56, df = 1/87, $p < .025$). The interaction is represented in Figure 1. Analysis of the simple effects indicated that the whites conformed significantly more to white peers than to Negro peers (F = 4.79, df = 1/87, $p < .05$), and the whites conformed significantly more to whites than did Negroes to Negroes (F = 4.38, df = 1/87, $p < .05$). Nonsignificant differences were found between the amount Negroes and whites conformed to representatives of the other ethnic group, and between the degree Negroes conformed to Negro peers and the degree they conformed to white peers.

Sex did not act as a significant source of variance, not as a main effect nor as part of an interaction. However, inspection indicated that white females tended to display the greatest amount of conformity to unanimous majority pressures from members of their own ethnic group. The transformed mean conformity scores for Negro males, Negro females, white males, and white females were 2.28, 2.46, 2.70, and 3.31, respectively. Orthogonal comparisons were completed to test for possible differences in conformity between the various groups. White females were shown to conform more than the combination of white males, Negro males, and Negro females (F = 6.46, df = 1/87, $p < .025$). Non-significant differences were found between white males and the combination of Negro males and Negro females, and between Negro males and Negro females. In addition, nonorthogonal individual comparisons indicated that white females conformed significantly

more than Negro males ($F = 6.63$, $df = 1/87$, $p < .025$) and Negro females ($F = 4.50$, $df = 1/87$, $p < .05$). However, no significant differences were found between the conformity of the white males and that of the Negro males and the Negro females. This pattern of results suggests that the greater conformity among whites than Negroes was primarily due to the behavior of the white females.

Discussion

The hypothesis that the conformity of the white children would not be differentially influenced by the ethnic composition of the source of pressure was not confirmed. The ethnic group x source of pressure interaction shown in Figure 1 reveals that the whites conformed significantly less to Negro peers than to white peers. This unexpected finding was attributed to distinctions between the present study and earlier ones. Probably the most critical difference lay in the nature of the populations studied. Whereas the present study employed school children as subjects, the others sampled college populations. It is probable that the children were less influenced than college subjects by norms as liberal as those which generally characterize the college community. Also, it is likely that the children were less sensitive than college subjects to the so-called demand characteristics of the experimental procedure. Such factors, plus the fact that the white children had experienced considerable prior acquaintance with Negro peers, easily could have created circumstances facilitative of internally determined behavior. Thus, the children conformed or failed to conform because that was what they felt like doing, whereas, in the other studies, the college students acted as they did because that was the way they thought they were expected to behave.

Figure 1 indicates that the Negro children, unlike the whites, did

not conform significantly more to one ethnic group than to the other, although there was a tendency for them to be more influenced by whites than by their own ethnic group. Thus, Hypothesis 2, that Negroes would yield more readily to conformity pressures from whites than from Negroes, was not supported. The second hypothesis, as the first, was suggested from the results of studies employing college samples. Why was it that the Negro children were not influenced more by their white peers than by their Negro peers. Several plausible explanations can be offered. Perhaps the school integration experience and the recent pride enhancing civil rights progress have provided the Negro children with opportunities to develop self-confidence in their biracial interrelationships, augmenting their ability to resist social pressures from their white counterparts. Or, younger Negro children, having endured less discrimination than college age Negroes, are not as intimidated by biracial situations and/or have not fully learned the submissive role of a minority group member. Also, it may be that the nature of the Crutchfield conformity apparatus, by not permitting face-to-face contact, detracts from the social threat inherent in biracial interactions.

The results of the present study support those of Iscoe, Williams, and Harvey (1964) who found that Negro school children conformed less than white school children to unanimous majorities of peers representing their own ethnic group. And similar to the results of Iscoe and his associates, the difference between ethnic groups was attributable largely to the behavior of the white females. The prediction (Hypothesis 3) that white females would conform the most generally was supported although their was no significant sex differences among the whites. The absence of sex differences in conformity among Negroes, found in the

in the earlier and present study, conflicts with the common finding, both with children (e.g., Iscoe, Williams, & Harvey, 1963; Tuddenham, 1961) and college students (e.g., Crutchfield, 1955; Reitan & Shaw, 1964) that white females conform more than white males. Iscoe, Williams, and Harvey tenably attributed the discrepancy in findings to differences in child rearing practices, wherein Negro girls are expected to display greater autonomy than white girls.

The results of the present study may have some implications for inter-group relations in the United States. The Negro children did not buckle under to the influence of their white peers. This resistance of the Negroes conflicts with earlier laboratory studies which demonstrated that Negro college students tend to submit to influence pressures from whites. However, some studies (Katz & Cohen, 1962; Lefcourt & Ladwig, 1965) have shown that under conditions favorable to Negroes, they can be encouraged to display greater assertiveness and self-confidence. Perhaps Negroes now are being provided with such favorable conditions.

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